

Rural Telephone

There were two telephone systems serving Utopia in the early days: the Barrie-Angus line and the Ivy-Utopia line.

In 1908 a line running from Barrie to Utopia-Angus was constructed by Mr. John Johnston. This line was operated through the Barrie Exchange. This continued until the Barrie-Angus Telephone Company was formed and took over the former line in 1914-15.

For many years, the telephone system of the Utopia rural area was operated under the Ivy Exchange. Thirty people could have been using the one line which helped to create a type of community closeness since one only had to lift the receiver to catch up on the local gossip. In the case of a fire, one continuous long ring on the telephone brought an immediate fire brigade of neighbours.

An individual would often pick up the telephone and listen to others conversations. The people in those days didn't mind this. Everyone was quite close with one another. No one had any secrets, nor they didn't gossip about their neighbours. Many a time, if you wanted to know something or where someone was, you would ask the operator.

The first phone in Utopia was a private line between the Bell Mill and the railway station in Angus, where carloads of wheat would be arriving from the west. The home of Mr. John Bell also had a telephone installed. In 1914, a long distance phone call cost 10¢, while one for an outsider was 25¢.

Also, there was a phone installed at John Bell's residence. Richard was usually out at night with the council. John being lame was at home mostly.

In the late 1950's, a storm in the Utopia region knocked most of the telephone poles down, causing a great deal of damage. The Ivy and the Angus Exchanges could not meet the cost of repairs, so they consented to let Bell Telephone take over in 1957, however, the Barrie-Angus system did not dissolve until 1966.